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JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

Can a Japanese Become an American Citizen?
Do the Japanese Want to become American Citizens?



AMERICAN CITIZENS WORKING FOR
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JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

By P. B. Waterhouse

CAN A JAPANESE BECOME AN AMERICAN CITIZEN?

Swarthy settlers from the Near East can, Mexicans can, South Europeans and Negroes can; but a Japanese cannot become a naturalized citizen in this country. No, he cannot gain this privilege, not even if he has lived in this country from ten to twenty years, and may have the necessary character and personal qualifications, not even if he has a working knowledge of English, understands our forms of government and stands ready to declare his loyalty to this country; not even though he be industrious, law-abiding, and ambitious to build a home, and to settle down and carry his share of the social and civil responsibilities of his community.

Congress has never passed a law expressly debarring the Japanese from Naturalization, it has merely limited that privilege to "free white persons" and Negroes, and the Supreme Court, ruled in November, 1922, that free white persons meant only Caucasians, and that Japanese were not Caucasians and therefore ineligible to citizenship.

The fitness for citizenship of any person permanently residing in the United States should not depend on race, color or slant of eyes, but on his character and personal qualifications, his knowledge of English and our forms of government, and his personal attitude of loyalty to that government. It is wrong in principle to judge of a man's fitness for citizenship by his race or the part of the world he happens to come from, instead of by his ability to comprehend democratic institutions, his personal qualifications and his loyalty to our country.

Instead of prohibiting certain classes or people from becoming citizens, ought we not to insist that every person of whatever race or nationality permanently residing in this country, enjoying its protection and profiting by its opportunities, must measure up to a definite standard of qualifications, give his undivided allegiance to this country and share in its responsibilities, as well as its privileges, by becoming a citizen? To deny the rights of citizenship tends to develop class consciousness and race hatred, perpetuating our problems instead of solving them.

DUAL CITIZENSHIP

Under the 14th Amendment, every child born in this country is an American citizen, regardless of his race or that of his parents. Thus, Japanese born in this country automatically become citizens. At the same time the civil code of Japan declares: "A child is a Japanese if his or her father is a Japanese at the time of his or her birth," so that Japan also claims them as citizens. But Japan is not the only country that makes this claim, for most of the European countries and several countries in South America make the same claim. This dual citizenship is not good, but Japan has done more than most of the other countries in attempting to solve this problem. In 1916, she passed an Expatriation Law allowing Japanese born abroad to renounce their Japanese citizenship, provided the application for expatriation is made before the age of eighteen. After that age they must perform their required military service before they can become expatriated. So we see this problem is far reaching and complicated and Japan as well as all other nations must give up every claim to allegiance of American born citizens before it will be solved.

DO THE JAPANESE WANT TO BECOME AMERICAN CITIZENS? YES.

The younger generation, whether born in this country or in Japan, almost without exception, are not only actually assimilating American ideals, life and spirit, but are more than anxious to become good and useful citizens of the United States with allegiance to no other country. These young Americans of Japanese parentage have united in asking that Japan give up any claim of allegiance or military service which she may have, on the ground that their loyalty and service as American citizens belongs to America alone.

A considerable number, also, of the older adult Japanese in this country would undoubtedly be glad to become citizens, but the majority would probably not, as they doubtless still cling to the thought of going back to their native land to spend their last days. By carefully keeping the doors of the Pacific closed to Japanese labor immigration, and then granting to those Japanese who are already here, the same rights and privileges granted to all other aliens the so-called Japanese problem in California would solve itself in one generation.

AMERICANIZATION

The Japanese are the only aliens who have initiated, financed and carried out a constructive campaign of Americanization among their own people. Municipal Americanization officers working among them say that they are most receptive of American ideals and are eager to come up to American standards of living.

Those Japanese who are already here are just as lawfully here as any of the rest of us, and if our Democracy means anything, it means that equal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness shall be granted to all with prejudice toward none.

A WRONG SOLUTION

And yet Senator Shortridge of California, has introduced into Congress a resolution proposing a constitutional amendment which would exclude from American citizenship, children of parents themselves ineligible. "Such an amendment would violate the historic belief of this country that children born under our institutions can comprehend their purpose sufficiently well to exercise the duties of citizenship. By creating an increasing number of alien residents, such an amendment would aggravate rather than remedy the Japanese problem." (Prof. R. L. Buell, of Harvard University, in "Foreign Affairs," Vol 2, No. 2).

WRONG RESULTS

In the first place, it would help to cause confusion worse confounded, by creating two groups of American-born, American-educated, American-speaking Japanese. In the first group would be those American citizens born before the passage of the proposed amendment, who, with their children, would always be American citizens. In the second group, would be those Japanese born afterwards who never could be citizens, no matter how well qualified they were to function as such. In case of marriage between the two groups, of what country would the children be citizens? How would these second and third generation children feel toward America? Who could explain to them the justice of why they could not be American citizens, in spite of the fact that, not only they but their parents before them were born in this country, and regardless of the fact that they were just as fully qualified to be citizens, as far as language, education and character were concerned, as those in the first group? Would it be possible to persuade them that America was really practicing the great principles of Justice and Democracy which she preaches to the World?

To thus create a class without a country,

smarting under the sting of unjust discriminations, would only make matters infinitely worse. An impossible situation would arise with friction and confusion everywhere. What real and lasting benefit to California would come from this sacrifice of our Democratic Ideals? None, Whatsoever. The proposal is unjust, un-Democratic, un-American and useless.

THE REAL PROBLEMS

First: Immigration. It is not a question of opening the doors of the Pacific to let an indiscriminate in-flow of Oriental labor into our country. No one, no, not even the Japanese government thinks that is wise or advisable. All are agreed that the doors of immigration should be carefully guarded to prevent such economic difficulties.

Second: Colonization. Much of the irritation, between Americans and Japanese, especially in the rural communities in California, is caused by too many Japanese settling in some one place. So that, although the Japanese comprise less than three per cent of California's population, in certain localities the Japanese almost outnumber the Americans. This causes friction in the school and social activities of that special community. Furthermore, it tends to retard the rapid assimilation of the Japanese themselves. Granting the right of naturalization to the Japanese and then passing laws to prevent unfair racial combinations in restraint of trade, unnecessary Sunday work, excessive hours of labor, unsanitary living conditions, and the development of congested areas of a single people or race would be a big step toward a real solution of the problem.

Third: Americanization. How can we prevent Japanese of the second generation, born in America, from becoming a race-conscious group, functioning distinctly and separately in business, in politics and in social life? It can never be done by the method proposed by Senator Shortridge. His proposal would only perpetu-

ate the problem with no possibility of a final solution. On the contrary it can easily be solved by extending to them the hand of friendly brotherhood, and leading them to take their full share of the responsibilities in our Republic.

WHAT CAN WE DO

to help prevent such a stain on the fair name of American Democracy?

First: Eradicate from our own minds and thinking all prejudice. Get the other fellow's point of view. Refuse to be mislead by newspaper propaganda, or to do our thinking, second-handed. Look at the question from the sane standpoint of fundamental principles, rather than that of petty prejudices.

Second: Realize that there is something more at stake than merely satisfying certain elements in the state of California, whose prejudices clearly cloud their conceptions of justice. The very fundamental principles of our Nation, which we hold most dear are in jeopardy.

Third: Discountenance all those methods as detrimental to the welfare of our Republic, which play upon the prejudices and passions of men and which tend to arouse antagonisms and race hatred.

Fourth: Send a letter or a telegram to the Senator and Representative of your district, protesting against the proposed amendment. Get your church or your club to do the same. Insist that our government shall stand for a square deal to all.

Fifth: Write to the American Missionary Association for further information on the subject. There is a Branch Office at 120 North San Pedro St., Los Angeles. We will give you just as many of these pamphlets as you can use among your friends anywhere in the country. Do your part to help bring about a better method of dealing with this question, and the advancement of international justice and good will.



GROUP OF YOUNG AMERICAN-BORN CITIZENS IN THE MAKING